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MONTANA CHRISTMAS TREE SHIPMENTS HIGH AGAIN

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Once again Montana shipped more than 3 million Christmas trees to markets all over the Nation. Over 3.2 million trees were produced in 1949. This was only 42,000 short of the all-time production record of 1946 and represented an increase of 5.1 percent over shipments in 1948. (Table 1.)

During the past several years one of the significant trends has been the rather rapid growth of the industry in some of the newer producing areas. Thus, though trees from Lincoln and Flathead Counties made up three fourths of the 1949 shipments, these two counties account for proportionately less of the total than formerly. Flathead County led in production for the first time since 1943, while Lincoln County for the first time did not share in the rise in total shipments, producing slightly fewer trees than in 1948. The 5.1-percent gain in production over 1948 came largely from Flathead and Lake Counties, with Missoula and Lewis and Clark Counties supplying more trees in 1949 than ever before.

Table 1. Comparison of number of Christmas trees shipped - 1948-1949 - Montana

County	1948	1949	Percent of change 1948 to 1949
	- - - -Number of trees- - -		
Lincoln	1,269,874	1,201,064	- 5.4
Flathead	1,106,250	1,253,761	+13.3
Missoula	250,000	275,630	+10.2
Lake	126,500	200,812	+58.7
Ravalli	114,150	88,052	-22.9
Granite	106,400	93,509	-12.1
Sanders	87,900	88,928	+ 1.2
Mineral	20,000	31,500	+57.5
Powell	6,000	4,000	-33.3
Other 1/	11,812	19,700	+66.8
Total	3,098,886	3,256,956	+ 5.1

1/ Includes Beaverhead, Cascade, Gallatin, Jefferson, Judith Basin, Lewis & Clark, and Silver Bow Counties.

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A generally plentiful labor supply and the nearly ideal weather conditions during the harvesting season facilitated production. Railroad tie sawmills in some areas were shut down by a drop in the tie market, releasing a supply of workers to the tree industry. Also, the attractive tree prices paid by concentrators and high cutter earnings in 1948 stimulated a greater-than-usual interest in Christmas tree production in 1949. No snow fell until early November and the slight amount that did fall late in the cutting season did not hinder production. In fact, several buyers filled their orders by mid-November and stopped buying.

Reports indicate that both truckers and concentrators were more selective as to quality this year than formerly. They were also more particular about the size of the trees. In recent years cutters have tended to overproduce big trees as the buying trend has shifted to the apartment-size tree of 4 to 6 feet. Many concentrators attempted to reduce purchases of trees over 8-feet tall by lowering the price.

There has been a 50-percent decline in imports to Montana from Canada since 1946. (Table 2.) However, this has been largely offset in the past two years by trees coming in from Idaho. Sixty-five thousand Idaho trees entered Montana in 1949 and were loaded for rail shipment at Troy. This was about the same number that came from that source in 1948.

Table 2. Imports of Canadian Christmas trees to Montana

Year	Number of trees imported	Percent of total Montana shipments
1946	107,570	3.3
1947	89,944	3.6
1948	67,664	2.2
1949	54,050	1.7

Data from the Bureau of Customs.

Douglas-fir blight, caused mainly by the fungus disease Rhabdocline pseudotsugae, still presented a problem. The new growth of foliage has been insufficient to camouflage the blight-caused needle blanks on the twigs from the earlier infections. In addition, the 1949 needles have also been infected in many localities, further postponing recovery from the disease. However, the outlook is generally more hopeful because it appears that the dry growing season limited the infection of 1949 needles. So far experienced cutters have been able to sustain production by avoiding blighted trees, but this adds to the cost and complicates cutting, especially in those areas where the blight has been severe.

Seventy percent of Montana Christmas trees were harvested from private lands in 1949, while the other 30 percent came from public lands and was the greatest proportion ever furnished by that source. Production from both state and federal lands exceeded that of any previous year — even 1946, the all-time peak, when public lands furnished nearly 800,000 trees.

Table 3. Cut of Christmas trees by land ownership groups

Ownership group	Number of trees cut				Change	
	1948		1949		1948-1949	
	Thousand	Percent	Thousand	Percent	Thousand	Percent
Private	2,310	74.5	2,275	69.8	- 35	- 1.5
Federal	510	16.5	689	21.2	+179	+35.1
State	279	9.0	293	9.0	+ 14	+ 5.0
All	3,099	100.0	3,257	100.0	+158	+ 5.1

Over a third more trees were cut from national forests in 1949 than in 1948. (Table 4.) The 689,000 trees produced on national forests in 1949 was greater than the former peak of 518,000 in 1946 by more than the total national forest production of any year up to 1939. The Kootenai National Forest continued its substantial leadership among the national forests in Christmas tree production, but where in 1948 it supplied two thirds of all the trees cut from national forests, in 1949 just over half of the national forest total came from that source.

Table 4. Number of Christmas trees cut on national forests

Montana

National forest	1948	1949	Change from 1948	
	Number of trees		Number	Percent
Beaverhead	6,536	1,432	- 5,104	- 78.1
Bitterroot	27,757	45,439	+ 17,682	+ 63.7
Cabinet	-	905	+ 905	-
Deerlodge	14,088	33,831	+ 19,743	+140.1
Flathead	118,603	194,887	+ 76,284	+ 64.3
Gallatin	-	930	+ 930	-
Kootenai	338,476	373,734	+ 35,258	+ 10.4
Lolo	5,042	38,155	+ 33,113	+656.7
Total	510,502	689,313	+178,811	+ 35.0

Some 440,000 Montana Christmas trees were transported to market by truck in 1949. (Table 5.) This represents an increase over 1948 of about 50,000 trees shipped by truck, but the ratio of truck to rail shipments stayed about the same.

Table 5. Christmas tree shipments by railroad and truck - 1949

County	Rail shipments 1/	Truck shipments	Total shipments
	--Number of trees-		
Lincoln	1,135,250	65,814	1,201,064
Flathead	1,102,000	151,761	1,253,761
Missoula	204,250	71,380	275,630
Lake	156,750	44,062	200,812
Granite	80,750	12,759	93,509
Sanders	80,750	8,178	88,928
Ravalli	57,000	31,052	88,052
Mineral	-	31,500	31,500
Lewis & Clark	-	7,500	7,500
Powell	-	4,000	4,000
Other	-	12,200	12,200
Total	2,816,750	440,206	3,256,956
Percent of total			
1949	86.5	13.5	100.0
1948	87.5	12.5	100.0

1/ Data from reports by three railroads: Great Northern, Northern Pacific, and Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul and Pacific.

Montana trees were distributed to 31 states this year with the heavy majority marketed in the Central States. Four freight carloads were exported to Cuba. Illinois and Iowa retained their positions as first and second consuming states, while Indiana and Idaho were displaced in the upper 10 states by California and South Dakota.

Table 6. Leading ten state markets for Montana Christmas trees

1948		1949	
State	Trees	State	Trees
Illinois	584,000	Illinois	612,750
Iowa	375,000	Iowa	437,000
Missouri	243,000	Texas	308,750
Texas	233,000	Kansas	242,250
Kansas	200,000	Missouri	209,250
Oklahoma	190,000	Nebraska	199,500
Minnesota	185,000	Oklahoma	190,000
Nebraska	176,000	Minnesota	133,000
Indiana	105,000	California	125,750
Idaho	99,000	South Dakota	93,000